



*A Celebration of the life of
Joan Florence Clarke*

1935-2024





Joan's love given and received 'Around the World' everywhere from New Zealand to Uganda, from Japan to Canada makes Nat King Cole's references to County Down, Gay Paree and London Town seem quaintly parochial in their reach.

It has to be said that my mum, unlike Nat, was not blessed with a golden voice; singing lullabies to my brother David and me she knocked on the head early doors after brief flirtations with 'Michael Row the Boat Ashore' and 'Davy Crocket, King of the Wild Frontier'. But this particular song, 'Around the World', I fondly remember being sung to an infant Sarah Scott who seemed to love Joan's singing voice. "King, sing!" she would demand, and this is what she got:

MUSIC: 'Around the World' by Nat King Cole



Joan Florence Cook was born on July 2nd, 1935, in a Mile End hospital in London's East End, five minutes after her twin-brother Robert Sidney Cook.

At this time their parents were living in a tenement block somewhere in the area and on their arrival home they joined their elder siblings John, six, Doris, four, and Joyce, almost two. It is thought that the Cook family moved out to Barking where sadly three-year-old Joyce died in a pre-penicillin age of pneumonia after a mastoid ear infection when the twins were about six months old. The sense of tragedy and stress on the parents, particularly on Joan's mother Florence, led to Joan being taken away for more than a year to a children's convalescence home. Apparently, she was chosen, rather than Bob, because she was a girl and was considered, therefore, to be stronger than her brother.

This was in Carshalton which Joan had no memories of, but she subsequently heard that because she was left in a cot almost all of the time, when she did finally return home she had none of the skills that Bob had acquired during this period i.e. being able to feed herself, use a potty and run freely. Joan apparently shunned female attention as she had become very wary of

authoritarian nurses at Carshalton. In the Cook family's Barking home in Lambley Gardens Joan's earliest memory is of being put into a cot and watching Bob run around the garden.

In 1937 Joan's brother Lesley was born but survived just two months due to feeding problems. This was obviously a very traumatic time of great anguish for Joan's parents.



Joan had very few memories of these pre-war years, but she recalled lots of rushing around games with Bob and her father accusing her of encouraging her brother to misbehave, such as giving him the broom to unlatch the back door so they could escape into the street. Perhaps it was Joan that instigated a moment of gratuitous vandalism by giving Bob the stone to smash the fish shop window one day, after which they beat a hasty retreat.

At this time Joan barely remembered her elder siblings being around. She recalled playing in the street with children from across the road and one day John being in charge of them all when their mother returned from hospital with baby Margaret, who was born two weeks after war was declared in 1939.

Joan's earliest memories seem to begin at this time - John sharing a packet of biscuits with Doris and the twins who tied them up in wool and sat under the table with their lunch. Sitting under the table was quite a Cook habit it seems. Joan often recalled the story of being forced to sit there and keep completely still and silent when the rent man came knocking on the door. She

also remembered getting a whack from her mother for dipping her finger into a tin of condensed milk and eating it.

Perhaps the story from her childhood that was retold most often was the time she tried to chop off the head of a doll to see if the body contained toffees. This came about when she received the new doll as a present while Bob got a papier mâché policeman which *DID* have a head to remove in order to get to the toffees.

The Cook Family were very poor and her father, John Amos, did not find regular work in the docks. There was no social security in those days and when they were really skint her mother, Florence, had to apply for a very strictly means-tested poor relief. Joan recalled going with her mother to a local school to collect free dishes of food to feed the family.

By this time war was raging and John and Doris were evacuated. The house in Barking was given up as the rent was too high and the family moved back to the East End, but not before a visit from their mother's sister, their Aunt Doris, and her husband Fred, who took photos in the garden. They were the only people they knew who owned a camera.

Joan did not recall the outbreak of war when she was four years old, but she soon became aware that her elder siblings were no longer at home. A visit from the camera-owners, Aunt Doris and Uncle Fred, ended with them taking Joan back to Wapping to stay with the maiden grandparents, The Hooks.

This would have been at the time of the Blitz when the docklands of East London were heavily bombed for 57 consecutive nights. Joan vividly remembered sitting on the stairs in the flat and the whole building shaking from the bombardment, and yet at the same time watching her uncle and grandfather blithely shaving before calmly making their way to the local shelter in the basement of Gun Wharf in Wapping High Street. Joan's job was to carry a China teapot down the outside stairs of the flats. She was terrified of the gaps behind the steps, but she managed to bump down the steps on her bottom clutching the teapot to her chest - a memory that still haunted her in her nightmares for the rest of her life. The Blitz was in full flow, and she remembered coming out of the shelter and seeing what she thought was the whole of London ablaze. She was passed over the heads of the firemen to her Uncle Alf and taken over the dock bridge to Hermitage Way, near St Katharine's Dock, to her aunt's Anderson shelter in the garden where she was reunited with her mother, Bob and Margaret. She remembered sitting and sleeping in a wicker armchair with Bob in the shelter. When they came out there was devastating bomb damage all around and her mother and aunt were crying.

Joan and her family were soon billeted in her father's sister Aunt Sis's home in Bagshot to keep them safe from the bombing of the docks. It was here where she and Bob started school but all she remembered doing there was reciting nursery rhymes.

Aunt Sis and her husband had a smallholding here and kept horses, pigs, chickens and rabbits as well as a vegetable garden. They were very mean to their brother's wife and made her buy her vegetables from them. Florence was insulted when Aunt Sis decided to name her new-born piglets Joanie and Bobby, although Joan herself felt quite proud to have an animal named after her.

The war years were vague and hazy in Joan's memory although she remembered at one stage, they stayed in Rainham, Essex, with her paternal grandparents, and later in Dunstable in Bedfordshire with Aunt Pop - in both these locations the twins attended school.

During the war her parents were living in Jubilee Gardens in Wapping. At this time Bob and later Joan were sent to a convalescent home in Bournemouth. On a visit back to Wapping Joan recalled getting told off for addressing her mother as Matron.

Further movements throughout the war years included staying with second cousins in Chesham where her memories are of wearing second hand shoes that hurt; dancing round the maypole in early summer, and being the best in the class at knowing all her times-tables and having to stand on a desk and recite them to the whole school. She also had memories of going on a 'special errand' for her Grandad now and again where she would take a piece of paper with a note on it plus a shilling or two to a relative who worked nearby. Only later did she come to realise that it was her Grandad's illicit betting on the horses.

During the 18 months or so that Joan was in Chesham, Bob was in Dunstable until the bombing eased. One day when they were briefly reunited, they felt like complete strangers to one another.

When her parents returned to Wapping Joan shared a room in Chesham with her mother's sister, Doris, where Joan's favourite childhood Christmas happened because she received a pile of second-hand books which she read avidly.

In addition to reading, Joan's other hobby at this time was hemming round squares of old sheeting to make handkerchiefs. Her aunts also taught her to knit and tried to turn her into a lady. Joan recalled having a special dress for Saturday and one for church on Sunday as well as a straw hat with flowers on.

When she finally returned home Aunt Doris took Joan to London where her brother John met her, he himself having just returned from five years evacuation in Devon. John was now 14 and eligible for work, a complete but kindly stranger to 9-year-old Joan.

By 1944 the family were all back together living in Jubilee Buildings. They had three rooms. The kitchen was also a living room with just one table that they all sat round with a gas lamp and a radio that needed the accumulator

charged every so often. The seven of them shared two bedrooms - the three girls in one room and John and Bob in the other with their parents. John Amos ruled the roost and according to Joan they all had to sit quietly and listen to whatever he wanted on the radio - not that there was much choice - Tommy 'It's That Man Again' Handley, Dick Barton, Max Jaffa and the Palm Court Orchestra and Two-Way Family Favourites.



Michael's introduction to the next song

Well Joan rules the roost in choice of music today and this is a song that she specifically asked to be played at her funeral. In the mid-70s after, I'd finished my paper round by 7.30 on a Saturday morning, I'd look forward to playing my records when I got home. However, I was mindful that Mum and David were still sleeping or having a much-needed lie-in, so I'd resist the temptation of playing T. Rex at full blast and would put on Simon & Garfunkel's Greatest Hits which Mum soon came to love.

“If you need a friend”, “I’m on your side” and “I’m sailing right behind” – these words by Paul Simon aptly describe Joan’s humanity and commitment to making friends with and supporting others.

*MUSIC: ‘Bridge over Troubled Water’ by
Simon and Garfunkel*



After returning home from evacuation the twins and Margaret attended St Peter's School in Wapping, a brutal experience particularly for poor or less bright children where the headmistress got the children to hold up their handkerchiefs - in reality bits of old sheet - to prove they had something to blow their noses on. One time Joan had to tear her piece of cloth in half as her little sister had no hanky.

The regular visits of Nitty Norah, the head lice inspector, would often find Joan feeling the shame of having to take a note home to her mother about the condition of her hair.

Church attendance was almost compulsory. A 'boot ticket' would be awarded for each attendance and when you had ten tickets your mum could buy you footwear at a greatly reduced price.

The priest or 'Father' came into school once a week to lecture and discipline the children. One time Joan was ordered by him to go to the Head's office to fetch the cane so that a boy in her class could receive a thrashing from the priest.

With the war still not over and the fear of random bombing occurring at any time it was still a regular part of the everyday lifestyle to respond to an air raid warning and reach shelter. On the way home for mid-day dinner (as lunch was called) an air raid warning went off and the three younger Cook children scooted home as fast as they could, Bob leaving his sisters far behind. Joan, with Margaret in tow, was crying in fear when an alert lady spotted them, quickly grabbed them and took them into her shelter.

The teachers at St Peter's ruled with a rod of iron but fortunately for the twins they could cope with the work and were good at PE and games where they were both one of four team captains. Consequently, there was much rivalry between the four teams, particularly the two Cook-led squads.

At a big Georgian house on the Pier Head the undernourished children of Wapping were required to call in every lunch time to get a spoonful of cod liver oil and malt, a taste Joan really loved.

Both Joan and Bob passed their Scholarships and were two of just four children from St Peter's to go to the nearest grammar school - The Raine's

Foundation School in Arbour Square E1. Once at the school the boys and girls were separated and weren't allowed to meet. Financial assistance for buying uniform was provided on condition their parents signed a paper to agree that their children would stay on until they were 16 (School leaving age was 15).

Bob didn't last long at grammar school as he didn't like the school dinners and there was no football, just rugby. He left after a year and returned to St Peters' secondary school where on leaving he received The Pollock Prize (named after the famous priest) for being the best pupil in the school. Bob truly was The Pollocks!

Joan was in The B stream but struggled to achieve her best. At home she felt scared to bring out her homework for fear of being humiliated. The family all lived in one room and bedrooms were strictly for sleeping in.

Joan recalled a lot of Whitechapel Jewish girls being particularly bright. Her best friends were Phyllis Kristofsky and Rosemary Copperthwaite.

Although Joan excelled at sport - netball being her favourite - she was prevented from representing the school in Saturday league games as her parents required her to be at home doing chores, unlike Bob whose Saturdays were always spent playing football for St Peter's and other teams.

One sport that Joan was a late starter in was swimming, not learning to swim until she was fourteen. Indeed, she had a life-long fear of swimming out of her depth since the day she represented her house in the school swimming gala. She was forced to swim a length to secure a valuable gala point for Fry House in the middle lane, starting at the deep end. She was petrified and floundered through to the safety of the shallow end where the relief of putting her foot on the base of the pool came as an indescribable relief to her.

Coming out of Whitechapel Baths after swimming sessions the girls were able to buy a slice of buttered toast for a penny, or for a penny ha'penny with jam as well.

Sweets were still rationed but for threepence you could secure a bag of sweet crumbs from the bottom of the jar for no coupons. These very occasional treats were moments of pleasure that Joan treasured all her life.

When Joan was about 12 or 13 the Cook Family moved to a much superior block of flats: Matilda House, which is still standing and where many years later she chose to use as her vantage viewing point to watch her son Michael run The London Marathon. At Matilda House there was both a living room and a kitchen, three bedrooms and, oh joy of all joys, a bathroom which was quite luxurious. When Doris left home at 18 to marry Jim Allen, Joan and Margaret shared the room at Matilda House.

Although promoted to the A stream at Raynes in Year 5 (Year 11 today) Joan could only manage 3 'O' levels due to a lack of support and

encouragement at home. Her favourite lessons were History and English, but she said herself that she was a real duff in geometry and algebra, although her school reports state that she was an excellent arithmetician. Cookery lessons, which she enjoyed, ceased now that she was in the A stream.



In the summer of 1951, having stayed on at Raynes as promised until 16 (and a year after Bob left St Peter's School to take up employment in the docks) Joan left school with just three 'O' levels in English, History and Geography. Leaving school coincided with her father giving up work due to pleurisy. He left the docks and gave up on a couple of new jobs after just one day. At 48 he commenced a full and lasting retirement from work.

Joan's life after school saw her start work in a bank - and not just any old bank but The Bank of England itself. After having had her confidence take a knock when an application to work at Barclays failed to provide employment, Joan was encouraged to apply for The Bank of England and succeeded in her interview. And she was able to cock a snook at Barclays as The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street paid higher wages. The short journey to The City from Matilda House in Wapping was taken on foot, passing The Tower of London twice every day. Joan soon became friendly with several of the

Yeomen of the Guard (or Beefeaters) and they were on first name terms with each other.

Joan's work at the bank introduced her to a new environment and it is where, in The Issues Department, that she forged lifelong friendships with two girls from the commuter suburbs of West London - Valerie and Shirley. It was during her time at the Bank of England that Joan was eventually freed from the constraints of home pressures and was able to find accommodation independent of her family. She shared a bedsit in Kentish Town with her friend Rosemary, and later in Belsize Park the two of them shared with another girl - all three of them in one very large room. Between these two tenancies Joan recalls another residence she and Rosemary took up in a bug-ridden house with almost inedible meals supplied.



The 1950s was a time of fabled austerity in a country trying to get back on its feet after the ravages of over five years of war. One occasion for celebration, however, was staying up all the night of the 1st and the morning of the 2nd of June 1953 with her sister Margaret in Northumberland Avenue in central London to watch the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. (A few months later the young monarch would come to the Issues Department in The Bank of England, presumably to check that Joan and her pals Val and Shirley were issuing the correct amounts of new bank notes with her face on).

One of Joan's major regrets in life was returning home to Matilda House. Her father's demands on her were intolerable. Despite now being in her early twenties she was given a curfew by her father that she must be home by ten. She should have remembered from her experience a few years earlier when the keen boyfriend that treated her to expensive tickets to see Nat King Cole

at The London Palladium had to escort her back home to Wapping long before the show was over.

Joan was Akela to a pack of Wapping Wolf Cubs around the time that she regularly attended functions at Toynbee Hall in The Commercial Road. This was a hub of social activity in the East End bringing people from outside the area into the community. People such as Clement Attlee, William Beveridge, John Profumo....and Jack King from Chingford, who Joan would meet and marry in 1957.



After a brief time living with Jack's parents in Marmion Avenue, Chingford, the newly married couple moved to Newcastle where her new husband had found work at Rashleigh Phipps, the same company his father worked for. They lived in a flat above a butcher's shop in Westgate Road. Jack's parents did not approve of their son marrying an East End girl from Wapping and showed their disapproval of Joan throughout the marriage. However, Joan's new mother-in-law did make her a blue wedding dress for the couple's wedding at St Paul's Church, Dock Street, E1 - "a marriage made in heaven" Joan recalled Father Joe saying to them. Perhaps she misheard Heaven as Heddon because after first son, Michael, was born in 1958, they moved to Heddon-On-The-Wall in Northumberland, six miles from Newcastle.



As Joan's story takes her away from London for a while here's an appropriate moment to play her next choice of music. We shall interrupt the chronological flow of her life for a moment to say that it was Joan and her family's request that in lieu of floral tributes donations might be made to charity. Ralph McTell's 'Streets of London' has always been one of her favourite songs and she asked that it be played at her funeral. Joan was a huge supporter of the Big Issue, knowing not just the names of the sellers in Bromley but all about their situations too. She would stop and have long chats as she purchased the latest edition from them. This particular version came out a few years ago and its aim to raise awareness and donations for Crisis is essentially all that Joan stood for throughout her life. Just from her own experiences Joan knew just how easy it was through no fault of your own to suddenly find oneself fearing homelessness. It would make Joan and her family very happy if they thought you were able to cherish her memory by making a donation to Crisis.

*MUSIC: 'Streets of London' by Ralph McTell
featuring the Crisis Choir and Annie Lennox*



Joan's new life in the North East of England was anything but idyllic and over the next few years an unhappy marriage saw Joan employed as the only

female at a local opencast coal site, working on the switchboard, typing and making tea. It was a time when women with young children did not work. There was no real need for Joan to work except that her husband's extravagant hobbies such as outdoor fishponds and fish houses and indoor tropical fish tanks meant he kept her short of money. Her meagre housing allowance was impossible to live on. Jack insisted that Joan work so as not to be an encumbrance to him. When Jack had to return to London for work, he sent no housekeeping money, so Joan had to stay at work throughout the bitter winter of 1962-63 by which time she was pregnant with second son David.

Jack decided to leave his job at Rashleigh Phipps when David was a few months old and took a job in engineering based in North Somercotes, Lincolnshire. Totally disregarding Joan's objections, he decided that the house at 7 Valerian Avenue in Heddon-On-The-Wall would be rented out and that the King family were now going to be travelers and live in a caravan.

Six months of caravan life in Lincolnshire and a couple more in Blisworth in Northamptonshire took its toll on Joan's attempts to bring up her children in very trying circumstances. Joan said later that she never would have minded scrimping and saving if Jack had been willing to share, but he was not really fit to be a decent husband and father. Maybe if he had married a rich woman, things may have been different, she said

Fearing for the future of her two young children and making and showing great determination to stop blaming herself for being so weak and docile, Joan took up her sister Doris's kind offer to go and stay with her and her family in London. Joan borrowed ten shillings from a caravan-site friend for the train fare and with David in his push chair and a small holdall containing a few clothes, a tense and hasty exit escaping from Blisworth ensued, collecting Michael early from school, hiding behind the bus shelter in case Jack came past (he sometimes came home from work early) and finally the total relief as the train pulled out of Northampton Station. Michael clearly remembers the stress abating as Joan closed her eyes for several seconds and then puffed out her cheeks before lighting up a cigarette.

Melville House on Blackheath Hill was Joan's sanctuary in the summer of 1965. It was a grand gesture from Doris and her husband Jim and their two daughters, Joyce and Christine. For the next six months Joan re-adapted to London life after eight years and Michael began his tricky transformation from being a Geordie traveler to a fully-blown South East Londoner.



Doris found Joan a job with her at SPD in Wapping, Michael started his fourth primary school, Morden Mount in Lewisham, and David was entrusted to one of Doris's neighbours while Joan was at work. The lady who lived downstairs, Vi, is fondly remembered for dropping two-year old David down the loo when she momentarily left him on the toilet seat to answer a knock on the front door.

After working at SPD Joan then found office work at Greenwich Saw Mills, but the nagging fear of having not found a place of her own to live for her and her two young sons ate away at her.

She went to The Citizens' Advice Bureau and asked about finding somewhere to live. In those days there was nowhere to go for people in Joan's predicament except for a halfway house which was something she wanted to avoid. The CAB put her in touch with one Nicolas Stacey, the young, energetic and idealistic rector of Woolwich who was working on a scheme to help people in her situation. It is no exaggeration to say that without Nick Stacey's intervention in Joan's life in the late autumn of 1965 her and her children's futures would have taken a very different trajectory. Nick's scheme was called Quadrant Housing, and they had just two houses at that time, both still in need of modernisation. On meeting Nick at St Mary's Church crypt Joan was overjoyed to find he was not only very sympathetic but most anxious and willing to do all he could to help. Joan was to be given temporary occupation of the downstairs rooms of 37 Whitworth Road. Upstairs would be given to a couple in equally dire straits, and they would look after David and pick Michael up from school while Joan went to work. However, this plan didn't work out as the woman upstairs had her own young baby and didn't want the stresses of looking after somebody else's child as well. While waiting for the new Quadrant flats to be ready Joan and her boys moved

into Whitworth Road, again with huge help from Nick Stacey who provided beds, a settee and chairs. Sister Doris helped by providing a table and other essentials. Joan was so relieved to have a place of her own that it didn't matter that the house had bare floorboards, and the bathroom and toilet were shared with the couple upstairs. There was an outside toilet at the end of a wildly overgrown garden, but they were too scared to use it.

Joan contacted social services and through them found a registered child minder who lived locally. For the next few months leading into 1966 Joan would leave the house early to deposit her sons with Rita Martin in Nightingale Vale before going to work. Rita would look after David all day, take Michael to and from Eglinton School with her own sons, give them tea in the evening and wait for Joan's return from her secretarial job at AEI in Woolwich. However, this arrangement ended when Joan became sick - hardly surprising with all the movements from pillar to post and the traumatic events of the past year or so in her life. When she contacted social security for assistance to help her out for a couple of weeks while she recuperated, they sent a helpful lady to see her who told her that her working wasn't necessary. By the time she'd paid the rent and childcare costs the family of three were below the breadline. She would be so much better off receiving full benefit. This came as a huge surprise and great relief to Joan.



New tenants with a young son replaced the young couple with the baby and with them the move to the newly converted flats in Vernham Road happened in early 1966 - the Kings were among the very first Quadrant tenants. The house at No 73 had been converted into two flats with a decent kitchen and new bathroom, although there was no interior decoration as Quadrant couldn't afford it. The Kings had the downstairs flat with a large bedroom for the three of them and a decent-sized living room with a door leading out into a small yard, or garden even, while The Bakers (Brian, Doreen and Melvyn) took the top flat. Michael changed schools yet again, starting his sixth primary school at Plumcroft in early '66.

It was at this time that Joan made friends with Gillian Scott and her family who lived around the corner in Genesta Road, but crucially their back gardens bordered each other. When a mysterious gap or hole in the fence appeared - most certainly *NOT* a destructively wanton act perpetrated by the Scott infants, Clive and Sarah - Gillian would regularly bring Joan a curry meal that she'd cooked and a glass of wine. Joan and Gillian used to walk to Woolwich Common nursery school each day when David and Clive started there together. Upstairs neighbour Doreen Baker soon had another baby, Adrian, and Joan recalled that her favourite occupation was to tidy up her own flat and then spend the rest of the day with her children in Joan's flat or Gillian's house, only returning home when it was tea-time.



Gillian and Joan became very good friends, a friendship that lasted Joan's entire life. For a time, Joan did housework for Gillian and also decorated a bedroom and kitchen for her, for which Gillian paid her.

Around this time Joan was given a typewriter and as she was allowed to earn a small amount in addition to receiving income support, she did some home-typing. This involved collecting envelopes from an office in London and typing out addresses from lists. If Joan could type a thousand envelopes a week, she could earn the permitted limit of 30 shillings (£1.50), although fares for herself and Michael to and from The Angel cut into this bonus.

In early 1966 Joan bade farewell to her sister Margaret and husband Bob as they set off with their three children, Carol, Barbara and Ian, for a new life in Canada. It was an emotional parting at Waterloo Station where the train was bound for Southampton where they would board the RMS Carinthia. Michael recalls Margaret hugging him closely, giving him the 1966 Dr Who Annual which she'd just purchased for him at the station WH Smiths, and telling him to make sure he looked after his mother and brother.

Everybody remembers 1966 as the year England won The World Cup and Joan and Michael watched the entire tournament on a very old second-hand television that someone had thrown out. The picture was miniscule - perhaps no more than three inches square. For the final they were joined by Joan's niece, Joyce, and they celebrated as wildly as everyone else in the country when Geoff Hurst scored his famous hat-trick. The tiny size of the screen made it even more impossible to judge whether Geoff's second and England's match-winning third goal had actually crossed the line. We will never know! We will never care!

At least Joan still had sister Doris to call on for support and friendship and in the late Sixties Woking was the only place to be at Christmas time. With new husband Fred, the Kings enjoyed their yuletide visits there with cousins Joyce, Christine, Jennifer and later baby Keith.

And twin-brother Bob was never far away. Often a Sunday afternoon was a cause for excitement when Bob and cousin Robert would pay a surprise visit, crossing the river from Shadwell to New Cross and 53ing it to the leafy environs of SE18's Plumstead Common and Shrewsbury Park. They never said when they were coming, they just turned up. "But what if we're out when you come?" a worried Joan would always protest to her brother. Bob would just chuckle and shrug, but there was never a time when the Kings were out when the Cooks came calling.





By 1967 Joan had managed to secure a much better second-hand black and white television and she and Michael had happy memories of watching that year's broadcasting highlights: The Beatles singing 'All You Need Is Love' on Our World and Sandie Shaw winning The Eurovision Song Contest with 'Puppet on A String'. The following year they loved but were equally saddened by The Seekers' live farewell concert on BBC. Joan was always commenting that Athol Guy of The Seekers was the spitting image of her brother John who had emigrated to New Zealand in 1961 and who she was sorely missing. She also thought singer Judith Durham looked just like her friend Gillian, who thankfully was just a fence hole away. The 1968 European Cup Final was another television highlight but when Benfica took Manchester United to extra time there was a knock at the door when Doreen from upstairs popped down for a natter, believing the game to be over. Too polite to tell her where to go, Joan missed all three of Manchester United's extra time goals.

In 1968 the Government announced a new scheme to recruit teachers. As all unqualified teachers had to either leave the profession or retrain, there were

many vacancies. A teacher training scheme for mature students was announced. Provided you passed certain tests you didn't have to have the usual necessary qualifications. After an initial disappointment when applying to the wrong department, Joan was accepted to start three years' training at Avery Hill College commencing September 1969. This brought equal measures of excitement and relief to Joan. Although a place at nearby Avery Hill would have been much easier travel-wise, the daily journeys through the Blackwall Tunnel with fellow mature student driver Alan Wise and friend and neighbour Coral Piggott to the Mile End Annexe saw Joan return on a daily basis to the very place she was born.

Prior to commencing the three-year course, the King Family moved down the hill from 73b to 9b Vernham Road which had three bedrooms and a much bigger garden. Joan prepared herself by going to Woolwich College of Further Education to study for two more 'O' levels, Art and English Literature, with Jo Styles, the sixth form girl from next door popping round every Tuesday evening to babysit Michael and David. Here Joan met another life-long friend, Ellis Stewart, more of whom we'll hear later.

Upstairs neighbours at No 9 were Diane and Malcolm and their young children, Lisa and Richard. Joan became friendly with them, even entrusting Diane with a key so that she could come through the downstairs flat when Joan wasn't there in order to hang out her washing in the back garden, rather than having to walk a few yards up or down Vernham Road to enter the garden by means of the back alley. They remained good friends when the Lloyds moved to a new house in the area.

Around this time Joan became involved in The Woolwich Holiday Playscheme when Joyce Prior, later Saunders, offered her a job as playleader. Joyce (along with her husband Charles and children Susan and Anthony) had become a very good friend of Joan's for some time, first coming into contact as the Quadrant rent lady. Joan continued working voluntarily on the playscheme for several years and served on the committee and was greatly involved in raising funds for the scheme by helping to organise jumble sales, discos in the crypt, town hall dances and so on.

Joan became friendly with all sorts of colourful characters either in Vernham Road or through new acquaintances at college. Her main subject at Avery Hill was to be Geography as the take-up for her preferred specialism, History, was already full when she applied. This necessitated field trips and Joan left her boys in the care of neighbours Mr and Mrs Dorey a few doors up the road when she went to Ingleborough in Lancashire for a week with her fellow Geography specialists.

David has great memories of life with his mother at 9b Vernham Road including spotting Venus and Mars from the back garden by using that great astronomical tool, the Ladybird Book of Exploring Space. Tiddles the cat was

always close by as 'magic times' were experienced during the various Apollo missions and Moon landings.



Around this time Joan entered a relationship with Peter Wison, who had two children himself, Vivienne and Paul. The Kings and Wisons shared a memorable holiday at Butlin's, Cliftonville. Later she took up with Ben McCaffrey, a wise, helpful and stable influence for Joan and her sons.

Joan qualified as a teacher in 1972 and started working at St Mary's in Woolwich under the headship of her old friend, Joyce. She would spend the next 14 years there making many friends with the staff: the two Pats, Judith, Gloria, Bill, Linda, Irene, Mozelle, Jean, two other Joans, May and very many others.





When the Lloyd Family upstairs moved to a new home the three Kings moved up from 9b to 9a Vernham Road. This was a decision Joan soon regretted as not only did she miss her garden but for once she found it impossible to forge friendly relations with the new tenants downstairs, and in 1980 she arranged a flat-swap with a friend entailing a move to Ravens Way in Lee where she lived until 1983 when she married Peter Clarke.

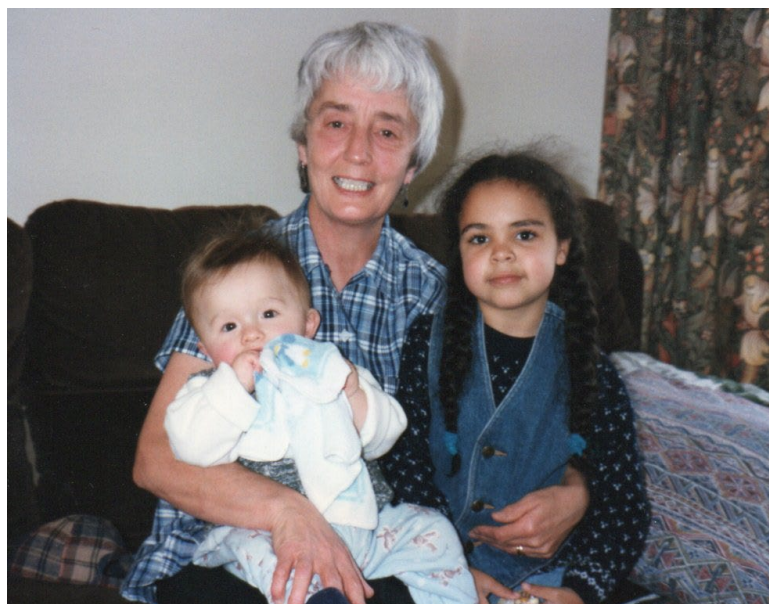


She went to live in Peter's home in Dukestorpe Road, Sydenham, very near to Queensthorpe Road where, coincidentally, Joan's old friend Gillian had moved with her husband Michael and their four children in the early 70s. Peter and Michael became firm friends and drinking partners despite, or perhaps because of, being complete political opposites.



Peter had been married before and had two grown-up children, Peter Junior (or PJ) and Susan.

In September 1991 Joan was overjoyed to have her first grandchild when Chloe was born to her proud parents, Peter Junior and Geraldine.





Joan introduced her new husband to walking which he took to like a duck to water. They had many lovely walking holidays as well as trips abroad and holidays with his daughter Susan as well as a trip across 'the pond' to be with sister Margaret and Frank and their children and grandchildren.



They moved from Sydenham to Tonbridge and in 1995 a second grand child, Ben, arrived, followed by Maya in 1998 and later Jimi, by which time Joan had moved yet again to Ellen Close in Bickley.



In the garden at Brindle's Field Joan and Peter particularly loved growing roses, taking trusted horticultural advice from next door neighbour and future prize-winning landscape gardener Angie Boakes.



Peter's death in 2001 was a particularly painful and difficult time for everyone as it was compounded by the deaths of his brother Jim and son Peter soon afterwards.

Angie, like other neighbours before and afterwards, became a very special friend and was invaluable to her after Peter's death and all the years up until Joan's own death last month. Angie facilitated Joan's move to Ellen Close in Bickley in 2007 where, once again, Joan made many new friends, particularly next-door neighbour Gennie and her family, and she also became a neighbour of her old dear friend Peggy, who lived a few doors down.



In 2007 Joan flew to New Zealand alone. This was the trip of a lifetime and a huge adventure where she got to spend lots of time with her favourite brother John, his wife Judy and her nieces Marjorie and young Judy and nephew David and their families. Indeed, so close were the bonds forged with them that when they visited England later on, they stayed with Joan, as did Leigh-Ann, Margaret's daughter-in-law, from Canada.

Joan's holiday fellowship and walking club committee responsibilities were of a huge benefit to so many who truly valued Joan's friendship, organisational skills and devotion to duty.

When Michael's wife Masayo was injured in a road accident and hospitalised for several weeks, Joan provided invaluable support to the family as she took over full responsibility for looking after her grandchildren and getting them up and ready for school each morning.



David's poor health conditions over many years saw his mother always there with advice, support and cash. She helped Grace, David's partner and mutual companion of 25 years, study and qualify to be a social worker. Joan was with them both in Gateshead in 2005 and in 2019 for Grace's own major illnesses.

Love, help, communication, parcels and money to Grace's family in Uganda were received from Joan. Musiime, who is now a chef, and Ronald a doctor, got very excited about the parcels, particularly Musiime, but also, Teddy (Musiime's Mum), Deo, Johnny, Tina, Olivia, Simon and Annette. Joan even hosted the late matriarch Mama Grace at Brindle's Field and Ellen Close.

David's special memories of his mother are numerous but he particularly recalls some wonderful holidays with her in a caravan in Folkestone during the 1970s. One year Michael joined them, another her friend Joyce, and finally just the two of them where he recalls Joan being care-free, relaxed and extremely happy.

He had a great time as her proud navigator traveling hundreds of miles visiting friends and relations with her after she passed her driving test in the mid-70s. This was a time when both sons took full advantage of her new taxi service to take them to local Millwall away games at the likes of Fulham and Leyton Orient and even Highbury for a League Cup Third Round second replay with Orient where Joan was flabbergasted at the superb quality of the Arsenal women's toilets.

A holiday in Ireland he and Grace shared with her was another very special memory he has of a great time spent with his mother.

Joan was a long-term member of the Labour Party, a union member (NUT) and one time school rep who retained her membership after retirement. Most importantly of all, Joan was a lifelong Millwall supporter. Her diaries recorded all the Millwall and Newcastle results over the years. She loved watching international athletics meetings on television, especially the Olympics, and would often enthuse to her grandchildren that "We've got a boy/girl running in this". All her life she was a very keen reader and got through an enormous number of books. She loved trips to the theatre and saw many diverse performances in countless theatres over the years. In her retirement she did voluntary work for the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

One constant throughout Joan's life was her sweet tooth. It was remarked upon by so many of her carers in both Clairleigh and The Oaks. From the ration-free sweet crumbs outside Whitechapel Baths to the jars of assorted goodies from Mr Simm's Olde Sweet Shoppe that grandson Ben regularly bought for her when he visited, Joan had always enjoyed the edible pleasures of sweet treats and desserts. In the care homes towards the end of her life Joan always had a healthy appetite, particularly for ice cream and puddings. Mike's friends fondly remember her quality afters: For Pete in the

1970s it was her lemon meringue pie, for Keith forty or so years later it was the giant Christmas tiramisu that she made for him. Michael and David learnt the basics of world geography from her chocolate puddings, which represented the land mass, the custard the sea. Before tucking in to the delicious pud Mum would make them say which country or continent of the world the pudding resembled. That's obviously how she became a Geography specialist at teacher training college, and perhaps it's no wonder that eldest son Ben is an expert at knowing all the flags of the world; that grand-daughter Maya now has a full-time job of shepherding young LSE Geography and Environment students around, and grandson Jimi graduated from Swansea with a degree in Geography earlier this year. Grandma would have been so proud.

By 2015 due to her struggles with vascular dementia Joan moved from Ellen Close into sheltered housing at Kendall Lodge where, as ever, she instantly made lots of new friends. This was a necessary move but involved downsizing to a one-bedroom flat in Willow Tree Walk, just off Widmore Road in Bromley where a few years later Covid came calling and the lockdown proved to be a tough and trying time for everybody. At the same time a diagnosis of Alzheimer's was heartbreaking for Joan to come to terms with and a move into full-time care followed in 2021. However, her love of reading sustained her for a while. She particularly loved Hilary Mantel's 'Wolf Hall' and 'Bring Up the Bodies' but struggled to complete 'The Mirror & The Light'. The last book she truly enjoyed was Bernadine Evaristo's 'Girl, Woman, Other'. Nicolas Stacey's memoir 'Who Cares?' was read and re-read in the care home until it fell apart, and Joan ordered Michael to reassemble it with Sellotape and send it to David.

So many people were involved in Joan's life and so many loved her and were loved by her that it is fair to say that we are only scratching the tip of the iceberg when we mention them by name. The messages and cards of former pupils, colleagues and friends from so many different times and walks of life is phenomenal and a testament to a life fully lived and appreciated. Joan was a source of inspiration and confidence and a great lover and supporter of so many people and causes. A philanthropist by nature donating to very many worthy causes, she also gave so generously of her time to such a wide and diverse variety of people. She will be truly missed.

Sadly, in recent years Joan was attending too many funerals - her dear sister Doris, her friends Eileen, Neal and Phil and many others. In 2022 younger sister Margaret left the world. Last year Joyce Saunders, her very special dear friend of 58 years passed but there was no possible way Joan could understand any of this.



The advanced state of Joan's dementia, both vascular and Alzheimer's, meant that in her final years she did not recognise her old friends. Not that that stopped one special friend dating back from their time at Woolwich College in 1968 from regularly visiting her. Ellis Stewart laughed off Joan's rudeness and insults that were a symptom of her condition. It was obvious that Joan had no idea who Ellis was but that did not stop Ellis visiting Joan again and again at both Clairleigh and The Oaks. Sadly ninety-five-year-old bright-as-a button Ellis herself passed away suddenly earlier this year. Other than her immediate family, Ellis was Joan's last visitor.



This year also saw the departures of her great friend from The Bank of England, Shirley Willcox, who wrote to Joan regularly right up to early this year despite knowing that there was no chance of receiving a reply from her.

Joan's beloved brother John also died this year but the great shock a few months later of hearing of his daughter, niece Judy's tragic, untimely death was lost on Joan whose dementia had now increased at a devastating pace. It only seemed like yesterday that Judy and her wonderful husband Peter had been guests at Joan's home when they visited from New Zealand. She dearly loved Judy and Peter, as she loved all her nieces and nephews and their families.



In her final three or so years of life the nurses and many carers both at Clairleigh and The Oaks went out of their way to make Joan's life meaningful and comfortable and showed great tenderness, love and understanding towards her in ways it is hard to imagine. The King family thanks them deeply for their involvement in the final chapters of Joan's life.

Throughout her life Joan always meant well, but sadly for her the great carnival of life is now finally over.

MUSIC: 'The Carnival is Over' by The Seekers



